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SUBJECT: ROK REACTIONS TO DPRK MISSILE LAUNCHES

ROKG REACTION  
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¶1. (SBU) Following an emergency NSC meeting early in the morning on July 5, ROK Senior Presidential Secretary for Security Policy Suh Choo-suk announced that the DPRK, between 0332 and 0500 Wednesday, had launched six missiles, including the Taepo Dong II as well as Scud and Nodong class missiles. Suh read the official ROKG statement that expressed serious regret over the missile launch, which would strengthen the international community's "hardline" stance toward the North and hurt inter-Korean relations (see para 6 for full text of ROKG Statement). We understand from our contacts that Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok had advocated a "soft stance," which was vigorously opposed by Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon and Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-woong.

¶2. (U) President Roh Moo-hyun presided over a meeting of security ministers at the Blue House later in the morning. Subsequently, in a press conference at 1400, Foreign Minister Ban reiterated the themes of the ROKG statement and Suh's news conference. Ban emphasized that the ROKG expressed serious regret for the DPRK missile launch and that the DPRK should take responsibility for its actions. The Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Ban at 1700 (local) to discuss the implications of the missile launches and the likely ROKG responses (septel).

¶3. (U) The Ministry of Defense has intensified the ROK military posture to "general heightened security" and increased patrols near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and Northern Limit Line (NLL). However, the overall defense condition remains unchanged (WatchCon 3 surveillance status and DefCon 4 readiness status). A U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) crisis action team has been activated and in operation status since 0600 hours.

¶4. (SBU) Assistant Unification Minister Lee Kwan-sei told reporters that the ROKG was considering canceling inter-Korean ministerial talks that are planned for July 11-14 in Busan, South Korea. He added that Seoul, however, would complete an agreed shipment of fertilizer to North Korea, which our MOU contact later explained was already scheduled for completion within a matter of days.

¶5. (U) Vice Finance Minister Bahk Byong-won was cited in

local media reports saying that the DPRK missile launches would not have any direct influence on the ROK economy, adding that the financial markets had quickly stabilized after previous North Korean missile launches.

¶6. (U) Full text of the ROKG Statement as issued at 1015, July 5, 2006:

¶1. The ROK Government has convened the NSC Standing Committee at the NSC conference room from 7:30 am to 8:40 am this morning to evaluate North Korea's missile launch and discuss how to address the situation.

¶2. On July 5 at 5:30 am at the Hamkyongbukdo Hwadaegun Daepodong and from 3:32 am at the Kwangwondo Ahnbyungun Kidaeryong launch site, North Korea has launched a Daepodong-II (Taepodong-2) and several Scud and Rodong (Nodong) class missiles toward the East Sea (Sea of Japan), respectively. It is currently estimated that the Daepodong missile launch has failed.

¶3. Since early May, the ROK Government has closely monitored a series of North Korean activities related to the missile launch, and has warned North Korea numerous times to withdraw its launch plans by indicating the negative consequences a missile launch may bring.

¶4. The ROK Government expresses its series regret for North Korea's unwise action to launch, despite our warnings, which will strengthen the international community's hard-line stance toward North Korea and thereby further isolating North Korea internationally, and will harm peace and stability in Northeast Asia by providing a possible excuse to increase armaments in the region, and will seriously damage the South Korean people's sentiments towards North Korea.

¶5. North Korea should assume responsibilities for the incident caused by the launch. The ROK Government solemnly requests North Korea to cease provocative actin and rejoin the Six Party Talks and resolve the problem through dialogue and take part in the international nonproliferation efforts.

¶6. The ROK Government will closely cooperate with relevant countries on specific measures regarding North Korea's missile launch.

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POLITICAL REACTION

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¶7. (SBU) Ruling Uri Party Chairman Kim Geun-tae told reporters that "despite the strong urging from the Uri Party and the ROKG, North Korea has launched missiles . . . We strongly protest this incident to the North Korean authorities." A senior member of the ruling Uri Party, Representative Kim Boo-kyun, told poloff on July 5 that it was deeply regrettable that the DPRK took an action that ran counter to the wishes if the international community. During an emergency Uri Party meeting, many lawmakers wanted the party and the ROKG to issue a stronger reaction. Some lawmakers were concerned about the appearance of poor information sharing between Washington and Seoul, noting that many believed that the Japanese media had the story before the ROK did.

¶8. (U) The opposition Grand National Party issued a statement criticizing the DPRK for ignoring the warnings of the ROK and the international community and endangering peace in Northeast Asia; (2) criticizing the Roh administration for not cooperating with Washington and Tokyo in speaking with one voice toward the DPRK; and (3) urging Seoul to seek greater coordination with Washington and Tokyo.

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PRESS COVERAGE

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¶9. (U) Initial press reactions have been primarily limited to reporting ROKG and international reactions. Some analysts speculated that Seoul would be under strong pressure by

Washington and Tokyo to join possible international "punitive actions" against the North. Professor Nam Joo-hong, a North Korea expert at Kyonggi University was quoted as saying that if the Roh administration did not join international punitive actions, ties with Washington might be further strained, and the ROKG would face harsher criticism from conservatives at home. Paik Hak-soon, a senior researcher at Sejong Institute, opined that existing inter-Korean programs could be maintained, but Seoul should not expand them for the time being.

VERSHBOW